

NEBRASKA SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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State of the Judiciary Offers Insights into Judicial Branch through Program Highlights

In his first State of the Judiciary message Chief Justice Mike Heavican showcased recent projects and programs of the judicial branch to the Nebraska Unicameral and viewers tuning into the address via educational television.

Remarking that the judiciary, the Third Branch of government, is often the least understood of the branches, he offered a glimpse into the administration of the courts through a review of statewide improvement efforts.

Heavican also distributed a preliminary court caseload report to legislators remarking, “The sheer number of cases our court system handles each year is astonishing considering the judicial branch is allocated just two percent of the state’s entire budget. In fact, the judicial branch essentially pays for itself, as fees and fines collected by courts are distributed to local school systems, Nebraska Legal Services, the Law Enforcement Improvement Fund, the state’s general fund, and other state and local services.”

Focusing on recent court initiatives, the Chief Justice recapped the multitude of recent programming efforts focusing on abused and neglected children who enter the court system. He cited work by the Nebraska Supreme Court Commission on Children regarding expedited case processing by the Nebraska Court of Appeals and newly adopted guidelines for the work of Guardians ad Litem. He also discussed the new “Eyes of the Child Initiative” which served as a springboard to recognize the state’s juvenile court judges, child welfare workers, Foster Care Review Board members, defense attorneys, prosecuting attorneys, and community members who have worked throughout the year to create substantial improvements in the processing of abuse/neglect cases across the state. According to Heavican, the “Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative” has established 25 judge-led, community-based court teams around the state with the goal of developing the best way to handle abuse and neglect cases – including cases involving the termination of parental rights. He noted that, “All of the teams are working hard to place abused and neglected children in permanent, safe, and stable homes as quickly as possible.” Citing Dodge County as an example of the success of the Initiative, Heavican noted that the number of children in foster care has dropped by 50 percent since the advent of the program.

Heavican also discussed circumstances which strain Nebraska’s “already thin” judicial resources such as the unique requirements of drug-addicted offenders, concerns with non-English speaking litigants and the time-consuming needs of self-represented litigants; all of which are on the rise. As a result of these unique court clients, Heavican noted that both the judicial and legislative branches will continue to grapple with the efficient allocation of court resources.

In concluding his remarks, the Chief Justice noted that Nebraska has exceptional officers and, consequently, one of the finest systems in the country. He expressed his appreciation for the legislatures’ support of past court endeavors and asked for their continued support of Nebraska’s judicial branch.

[On-line text of the State of the Judiciary](#)

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